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"The Integrity of American Politics."

AN

ORATION:

DELIVERED BY

HON. RICHARD VAUX,

AT THE

GIRARD COLLEGE,

ON

FOURTH OF JULY, 1861.

Philadelphia:

McLAUGHLIN BROTHERS, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS, 112 SOUTH THIRD STREET.

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Postscript.—When the author prepared these pages for obscurity, it was supposed, they being still-born, the obsequies would have been attended without form. The partiality of friends has prolonged their existence in type, it may be, nine days, a civic decade. For such an immortality one is more than compensated. The author feels so.

Source unknown

AN ORATION.

[Those of my Colleagues in the Board of Directors, who comprise the Committee of Arrangements for the celebration of this day, have invited me to take part in the proceedings. The invitation was most unexpected. Cordially communicated, it was accepted as a duty.

The remarks about to be offered, are intended to be in harmony with this occasion. They refer to the Integrity of American Politics. How justly, you must judge.]

History is the topography of the past. As the eye sweeps retrospectively the vastness between the present, and the horizon marked by the line of Time's record, it surveys those natural phenomena which the surface presents. They are produced by forces and influences to which science has given both a nomenclature and a name. Their existence is known, for they are presented as realities. Their causality combines the philosophy and the fact of their creation.

Thus the mountain, valley, hill, plain, prairie, desert; the gold, iron, coal; the rivers, lakes and ocean, are developments with which nature has varied the face of the earth. They attract notice and invite to consideration and study. Their creation, co-relations and elementary aptitudes are congregate tributes to man's destiny.

From whatever point of view they are regarded, principles are either evolved or involved, directly or collaterally connected with their character and locality.

In looking back to the confines from which tradition and letters take the burden of retaining and transmitting the surface developments of human progress, from the dawning of congregationalism in its rudest nomadic state, to the present condition of civilization: the mind is arrested in its travel over the panorama by the most startling objects of interest and wonder. The earth's population, the germ of government, the segregation of tribes, the polity of nomads, communital organism, the foundation of nationalities, the rise of empires, the fall of dynasties, the power of the sword, the controlling influence of crowns, the failure of

hierarchies, the uprising of intelligence, the wonders of Bethlehem and Calvary, the earthquakes which destroyed formulas, the invasions, revolutions, wars, victories and conquests; the power of the pen, the independence and courage of enlightened minds, the camp at Runnymede, the Commonwealth, the Colonies and our Constitution; stand out from their surroundings and rivet the gaze of the observer.

From whatever standpoint we make the survey, these facts and the philosophy of their existence become the most striking of all the phenomena.

They have had an existence, or exist. The causes which produced them are part of themselves, either subjective or objective, anterior or contemporaneous. Like mountains rising from the sea, yet it is demonstrated that they have foundations.

While making an examination of the patent, palpable exhibitions of the face of nature, we are followed by a train of sciences, which give explanations of the causes in relation to their effects, and interpret what else would be mysteries. Thus it is in our retrospect to other times. We are accompanied by guides which lead us to the ascertainment of the latent or hidden principles and powers, which have created or accomplished the majestic outcrops which surround our pathway.

The occasion which assembles us to-day, and the incidents which belong to it, as well as the condition of our country, justify a more minute investigation of the past, proximate and relative to our own epoch. Let us invite the aid, in this appropriate occupation, of narration, deduction, and analysis. Our survey begins at that degree of longitude which runs through Jamestown and Plymouth. It is the same line which is studded by the initial names of Raleigh, Gosnold, Weymouth, and Winthrop. Chronology points with her index finger to A. D. 1600—1650.

The social and political organism of Europe had been radically revolutionised. From Magna Charta to the first James, the sword and the pen held tournaments and had tilts. The night of ignorance was worsted by Sir Knight of Letters. Liberty of thought begat liberty of action. The mind enlightened, enfranchised faith and politics. The latent fire which began to burn in the depths of European political systems, made volcanic eruptions at Strasburg, Wittenburg, and Naseby. Thus was the surface changed. This new element was in agitation, arousing dynastic lethargy. The contest was unequal. The castles of feudal accumulation were plethoric with purposes and powers. Liberty had but one hope. The darkness which enveloped it was penetrated by the rays of the western sun. Its warmth and glowing brightness invigorated the longings for freedom. The western world was to become the witness of another exodus from captivity.

The first European colonists in northern America were pilgrims. Their shrine was free government, both of thought and will. They went, to demonstrate the feasibility of coming. Those who followed were exile-victims of power without responsibility. Let us speculate as we may on the causes which peopled the discoveries of Columbus on this continent, the undeveloped, unascertained, unknown truth which came with them was popular sovereignty. They, like the Athenians, worshipped an unknown God; they found it at last to be the right of self-government.

Oppression had produced the spirit of resistance. At home, resistance was vain; this feeling gained strength by suppression of its forces. Resistance to the demonstration of power drove away the oppressed, leaving the oppressor established. They sought in a new home, in a new world, what was denied in the old—freedom from a power uncreated but by their own will or voice; a government with-

out the abuses of power, circumscribed to the duty of protection. Their religion was Christianity. The dispensation from the Mount of Olives had abrogated that of Sinai. Religious freedom was the twin-sister of political liberty. The power of the State was tyranny; the power of the Church, bigotry. Allegiance thus severed from both made the soul and the man free.

Great ends are not rapidly reached. The encrustations of time on the surface are not easily destroyed. The colonists on the bays of Chesapeake and Massachusetts and Delaware, found themselves the subjects of corporate power. This was the grant of regal will.

Liberty was the franchise, but not freedom. They were governed by laws and law-makers not indigenous. Between the governed and the governors there was neither harmony of principles, identity of opinions, nor unity of interests. Their chartered prerogatives were to live, labor, report grievances, pay taxes and grow. The surface development was colonial life in a land of savages. Exigencies and perils were their penates. Home had its charms, with its oppressions. The home government was still bound to them by ties. The system was experimental. The colonists were self-dependent for all things but political existence. They had no amusements but to think. The anomaly became apparent; they were self-sustaining, yet not self-governing. The soil yielded them food, the country enemies, the earth graves; but the right to make their own laws had not yet been secured. The unknown God was unveiling itself. The soul was free, the mind at liberty, the man had fled from tyranny, yet the colonist was a subject. Then, for the first time on earth, the star of the new covenant was seen by these shepherds of growing ideas. It stood still over the birth-place of popular sovereignty. This child, in its youth, broke charters, enfranchised the exiles, man—made the

colonists. The subject was, by this dispensation, transformed into the citizen.

This was the first revolution in America. Republican government, in form and spirit, had its foundations thus laid. The enlarged theology of the Gospel taught a pure political system. Independence and equality were the deductions from the Christian dispensation. Self-agency and the universal application of the redemption power awoke religious reformations. Political reforms came from this spirit of resistance to monopoly of rights. Free government was the first born of these political and religious didactics of the colonists.

Thus, without concert or cognizance, Virginia saluted Massachusetts, in the victory of the new over the old ideas.

These colonies were isolated in locality. Among them was no concomitance, self-existing, self-governing, self-defending, an unseen influence connected them. The same sufferings, the same aims, the same ideas, the same language in which they prayed to the same God for safety, success, liberty and salvation.

The surface of this new earth was changing. It seemed that trials, difficulties, dangers and defeat were departing with the Dryads. Navigation furrowed its track on the ocean in the wake of emigration. Commerce and trade united unknown waters. It was transatlantic and territorial. Small settlements became provinces—provinces grew to States. The exile was a citizen of an inchoate nation. The eye of the oppressor looked out to the setting sun. Its rays gilded the symbols of western power. A crown was not visible. The cross stood majestic, guarded by a single star. It was the emblem of this new Bethlehem.

The oppressor smiled. A new kingdom was found for conquest.

The Crown was past ideas—absolutism. The Star was new ideas, or liberty and independence. We may call the war of *the second* revolution in America by any name, a contest for a conquest, or a struggle for subjugation, or a conflict for colonial allegiance—it may have either or all, but the outgrowth of ideas, the outcropping of colonial experience, had changed the surface bearings in the new world. This revolution was the first fight between man's right to govern himself and the right of others to govern him. The standards in the battle bore the principles of the combatants. The Crown and King and Parliament sought to make the laws for the colonies. The people demanded to make their own, and administer them. When Washington drew his sword at Cambridge, and the first cannon boomed its salute to the continental commander-in-chief, popular sovereignty became a system of government for man.

The colonists sought protection in combination. Confederacy was consistent with liberty and independence. Independence was then the idiosyncracy of America. Experience and experiment had solved the problem of self-government. Their possessions were political and religious freedom. To defend both was a duty to humanity.

A colonial confederacy existed. A republic amazed the nations. Liberty and independence and self-sovereignty lit up the western world. The bow of promise to mankind described a hemisphere.

Free thought had a continent for its refuge.

This retrospect is an essential necessity. It traces the cause-growth of our country.

Separate communities, their actual and political isolation, the foundation of confederation were consequences rather than causes. The attachment to separate independence was first incident to geographical position. Time made it a political fact. It was co-existent with first settlement. It

was the normal condition of exotic colonies. Yielding to combination, segregation was affirmed.

The first political principles of anti and post revolutionary existence, were separate independence and confederative unity. Marvellous in its conceptions, miraculous in its consequences. Divinity never spoke more plainly to man. Confederation was an idea of unity, perfect for its purpose. Individuality in combination without loss of identity. The whole life of the exile and the colonist taught him the value of self-reliance. The political life of each had circumscribed his longings for the right to govern himself. What perils had this cost him. What vigils, privations, conflicts, what moral courage, what faith? The spirit of absolutism was uneasy. It began the contest for its perpetuity. Its power was threatened, peradventure its existence. The new faith of the new world was portentous. The cloud in the west was but the size of a man's hand. The hereditary right of the few to regulate the many was attacked. In the banqueting hall of irresponsible government an apparition had been seen. She was of a known race. Her appearance was singularly original. Perpetual youth was stamped upon her face and form. Her beauty entranced, her figure attracted the beholders.

The unbidden guest affrighted the revellers. None knew her. She was representative government. Slowly and gracefully she advanced, and with a finger dipped in light she wrote on the wall of the palace of potentates: "Absolutism, thou shalt die." The chirography was in an unknown language. Its interpretation was made by the genius of American politics.

The colonies prepared for the coming struggle. The necessities of their condition required union of efforts. Separate resistance was impossible. United resources alone could be successful. The difficult question then to determine

was, union without centralization. Otherwise was impossible. Each colony was created by individual or separate efforts of the exiles. A common aim made them exiles, but not a common country either invited or received them. Their early condition was under corporate rule. Corporations were combinations against which they had revolted. Their first successes were produced by separation. They had achieved an existence by uncombined power: their security was in themselves; they were to govern themselves. Without the war about to be waged against them, there never would have been a Federal Union. This Union was the consequence of the crime of attempting to coerce the colonies.

The conflict commenced. The issues involved had augmented from the cause to the crisis. Submission, surrender, defeat, were the antagonisms of victory, liberty, union. The struggle of the revolution was faith against force. The new dogma of new politics in the new world. The past had no such inspiration. It was a Deism. This new doctrine pervaded people, States and confederation. Rejected by old ideas as a fable—denied by believers in divine right, accepted by the colonists as a faith, a fruition and a fact. This new dispensation was to be baptized in blood. This was essential to success. If it was in earnest it must prove it; if it had vitality it must demonstrate it: if it was a faith it must be tested by fire. Martyrdom is the seal of sincerity; beyond that is divinity.

The difficulties disappeared; objections yielded to ends. The confederacy was formed. It was separation in conjunction; *sui generis* yet saga-born.

The Congress of the confederation met. The popular sovereignty of the colonies and the colonists was there represented. It acted by the will of the people. It thus had its origin, else it would have been a league or compact

between States without constituents. The colonists were the constituency; the States were only a form of the expression of this idea. If this Congress was not a representation of the people, it carried out their determined purpose; that was revolution against power, created but by themselves—government without the consent of the governed. By whatever term or name it may be called, the sovereigns in the colonies were in Congress. The public will, general voice, and indestructible purpose of the colonists were there convened. Our survey now denotes the secondary formation, cropping out on the surface of nationality.

Let us be more minute. The present, with its errors, demands a looking after the truth. That is the inner life of facts. This inner life, then, of confederative combination of the colonies in Congress represented, was a fact or a fable. This Congress had a purpose. That purpose was to be accomplished. Means were necessary. The controlling spirit was success. Success was victory. Victory was the independence of the confederates. This independence was the synonyme for self-government, political and religious freedom, and a national sovereignty to attest the whole. This was the very integrity of the revolution. It was the cause of the colonies. They devoted life, fortune and sacred honor to these ends.

A defeat was to them but another word for political death. They would enter into that dark future over the portals of which would have been engraved a crown and this motto: "*On entering here leave hope behind!*" Such a crisis, such a conflict absorbed every actual, reserved or expected power. The political and geographical sovereignty of the colonies was vested in this Congress. It was the mind of the rude machinery of revolution. It made war, made peace; it made money; it raised armies, it made a navy, it exercised sovereignty, it was an inchoate nation. Let the world see it.

Remember, this was the confederate Congress; this, the colonies in combination; this, popular sovereignty in its boyhood; this was nationality undergoing the first test; this, the birth of the inner life of Union. We look in vain over and below this surface outgrowth for a reserved right by any colony in Congress, to do for itself, what they were doing collectively. It accomplished ever, only in conjunction, not otherwise. Nowhere is any evidence of any other idea to be found. There could be none. Circumstances, necessity, events, the irresistible exigencies of the crisis, the cause and success, were each and all witnesses against such a right, either latent or patent. Popular sovereignty had no such subdivision. It was then seeking universality of demonstration. It was extending from a colony over a continent. The inner life of confederation never contained the seed of secession. The confederation was a growing idea; its roots were the colonies, the soil of liberty its home. A nation, an empire came out upon the tide of time. In the clear blue sky of the firmament it asserted its God-given right to be a State and have a name. Its standard floated before the world inscribed with these cabalistic signs:

FOURTH OF JULY, 1776.

Let us celebrate this successor of that day in the spirit which made it immortal.

Philadelphia was one of the churches of the Christian dispensation, so Philadelphia was the cathedral church of the new political dispensation of America. Many a pilgrim has come here to renew his vows, and rekindle his almost expiring faith. Many were born under this blessing. What an inheritance for the exile's posterity. Popular sovereignty was a triumphant, accredited and acknowledged element in government.

It became the basis of a system. To-day we do homage

at its shrine. Never was a temple dedicated to so comprehensive and beneficent an idea. It was like that of Janus. It had two spirits in one, religious and political liberty. It became Christian by adding a third; self-government made the Trinity. The war of the second revolution ended.

The confederative Congress made peace for America, for all America, for all the colonial States. It asserted a sovereignty co-extensive with the power of the integral elements in combat. No subdivisions of this sovereignty claimed to exist independently. The flag which you have raised and saluted to-day as the emblem of our nationality, represents the idea which the peace made triumphant. It is the flag of the United States of America—a more perfect Union than the confederacy. The confederacy had no future. The Union, was perpetuity, or a failure.

Separate sovereign States—a federal unity; organic laws of each in harmony and subjection to the Constitution. Powers circumscribed, defined, equilibrate. Constitutional government of constitutional governments. This was the Union, is the Union, must ever be the Union. The sovereignty, acknowledged by the crown which claimed the colonies, to be in the confederation, was never parcelled out under or by the Constitution. It was transferred, not territorialized. It was compacted, not disjointed. It was augmented, not enervated. The Federal Union was confederation perfected. The confederacy was the outgrowth of necessity. Its powers were implied. The Federal Union was the fact which the confederacy established. It was the inner life of the revolution. It developed a nation, sovereign, supreme, and steadfast. Not centralized power, not supreme sole power. Sovereignty granted, not seized. Its powers, rights, duties were defined. It represented every element of the sovereignty of the people necessary to be a government. It spoke a voice unmistakable—"*we the*

people." It was popular sovereignty nationalized. We have saluted its symbol to-day. There it floats; let it ever be a sign to mankind, a symbol to the world. In future ages, everywhere, let that flag and this day be associated, the living embodiment of that *popular sovereignty* which is but *self-government.* As they rise high up out of the ocean of time, let their foundation be eternal. Let the rock of the faith of this new dispensation fall, and crush absolutism, irresponsible government, nullification, secession, and treason.

We are now re-baptizing the faith of the colonists. Let us to-day aid in the ceremonial. Let us proclaim an interpretation of the Constitution in harmony with its inner life. The rights of the people in the States in the Union, before the rights of the States anywhere. The sovereignty of the citizen secured the sovereignty of the United States. The United States and the Fourth of July, 1776; they co-exist.

While the Union is preserved, liberty is secured. When the Union expires the faith of the colonists dies.

Where, when shall mankind find another political calvary.

Another thought. It seems this subject suggests it. Three quarters of a century have nearly solidified the organic law of the Union. To adjust all its principles and provisions requires time. There are modes appointed by which this is effected.

In a great charter, like the Constitution of the United States, there are implied and express powers, reserved and granted rights. These involve questions for interpretation. But one jurisdiction exists for this duty. The sovereign people. They made it, they live under it, defend it, preserve it. When its very hidden life is to be developed, they alone can bring it forth. The interpretation of the Constitution is the exclusive duty of sovereign power. The people and

their organism of government are co-equals. As the one was created by the other, none else can explain it, if alterations are involved. This organism has had more than one interpretation by the people.

It could not be otherwise than a necessity might arise for this judicial action of the sovereignty of the citizen.

Coming as the Constitution did after the confederation, and the confederation from the colonies, the forces of centrifugal and centripetal action were not destroyed. To harmonize their effects was imperative. The one tended to a consolidated government of the Union. The other to independent government of the State. The early teachings of colonial condition cultivated State rights. It first attacked the Constitution at Connecticut. The Puritans had a love for Cromwell. It again assailed the Union at South Carolina. The Huguenots had a hatred for power not their own. The people in both instances interpreted the Constitution to be the supreme law.

Another error appeared in the assumed powers of Congress. A right was claimed by Congress to create a monopoly—a bank—a national institution in name, without responsibility to the constituents of Congress. The people interpreted the Constitution to grant no such power.

To-day secession is claimed to be the inherent right of the States. This last attack is directed against the Constitution, Union and Liberty. The people are preparing to settle this question forever. They are about to interpret the Constitution. This time it will be done with the ceremonial of battle, blood, victory, and retributive justice on treason. The faith of the colonists was baptized in the blood of the second revolution. The faith of the people will seal with blood their devotion to the *integrity of American politics.*

The sovereignty of the people will be vindicated, and the rights of the States secured. The Constitution will be pre-

served, and this will be accomplished by the people, interpreting what is a constitutional government of constitutional governments. Remember in this, that the letter killeth, but the spirit keepeth alive.

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